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TAGS: [KPAO](#) [SOCI](#) [MU](#)

SUBJECT: OMAN ONLINE: FLOWERS, SPEECHES, AND BOOKS

1. Summary: The Omani Internet message boards "al-Sablah" and "al-Majarra" are the liveliest and most comprehensive Arabic-language fora for political and social discourse in the country, touching on issues and personalities rarely addressed in the conventional media. While not totally free, nor wholly reflective of Omani public opinion, these popular sites nevertheless offer a worthwhile window into the hot topics and unvarnished views of the day. This edition of Oman Online contains the following topics:

-- Planting 3,000,000 Flowers in Muscat
-- Speech of U.S. Ambassador to Kuwait
-- Quran Desecration Revisited

End summary.

Let A Hundred Flowers Bloom

2. Omani newspapers recently reported that the Muscat Municipality intends to plant three million flowers around the city to celebrate Oman's 35th National Day in November. Incredulous al-Sablah members overwhelmingly criticized this proposal as a huge misallocation of resources. "Exactly how much will this cost the government?" asked one participant. Another suggested, "Instead of wasting money on flowers, the government should build decent and proper housing for low-income people. Is this how Sultan Qaboos wants to be remembered?" One calculating individual noted, "If we assume that each flower costs 1 Omani rial, then the total cost of the proposal will be 3,000,000 rials (about US \$7.8 million). We could renovate all the forts and castles in Oman for this amount, thereby stimulating the tourist sector and reviving our economy." One author mockingly pronounced, "The Sultan deserves one billion roses!"

Diplomatic Niceties

3. Members of the online forum closely followed the news about a recent speech by the U.S. ambassador to Kuwait that sparked controversy among some Kuwaitis. According to the forum, the ambassador reaffirmed U.S. policy regarding Iran's nuclear weapons program in an address to a military college; afterwards, the president of Kuwait's parliament reportedly stated, "The Americans should not bring their conflicts with other countries into Kuwait."

4. A chorus of similarly critical responses followed in al-Sablah. "This was all planned, and the U.S. ambassador meant everything he said. He is a Zionist," claimed one member. Another added, "Foreign ambassadors always try to get the host country to implement their policies, regardless of the host country's interests." One writer commented, "The Americans want to create conflicts between the GCC countries and Iran, so that they will have an excuse to stay in the region and tighten their control of the Gulf."

Books and Boycotts

5. Quran desecration allegations continue to resonate among al-Sablah members. One contributor called for an economic response: "Let us boycott American products for what they have done to God's book." The first wave of comments indicated a fatalistic attitude towards Oman's economic situation: "A boycott will be difficult, because the Omani market will be flooded with American products as a result of the FTA negotiations. Remember Catherine Novelli (who participated in an al-Sablah online chat in early 2005)?"

6. One inward-looking member triggered a second wave of comments by declaring, "It is not the Americans who desecrated the Quran; rather, we Muslims are to blame for not following the teachings of Islam. Many Muslims do not even bother to open the Quran." A significant number of participants agreed with the writer, saying, "If Muslims properly followed the Quran, and heeded its call for unity and strength, then the Americans wou